St. Aubin Street Massacre: The Benny Evangelist Family Murders

On a quiet summer night in 1929, a mystic healer and his family were slaughtered in their home by a mysterious axe-wielding killer.

By Elisabeth Tilstra | Published Jan 18, 2016

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Benny Evangelist (via Cold Cases Hard Copy)

On the quiet summer evening of July 3, 1929, Benny Evangelist and his family were brutally murdered in their residential Detroit home on St. Aubin Street, mutilated by an axe-wielding killer. His wife and four children were butchered while sleeping in their beds, while Benny himself was killed—and nearly decapitated—in his study. Evangelist was known as a carpenter, faith healer and, most intriguingly, a cult leader and author of a self-published religious text, *The Oldest History of the World: Discovered by Occult Science*. The list of murder suspects ranged from aggrieved cult followers to disgruntled clients of his mystical healing programs to a deranged stranger roaming the streets of Detroit, simply looking to kill.

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19 year-old immigrant Benjamin Evangelista changed his name to Benny Evangelist upon his arrival to the United States in 1904. Two years later,

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Evangelist constructed a bizarre apparatus in his basement that included nearly a dozen small wax figures depicting various “celestial planets,” as well as a huge “eye” that was electrically lit up from the inside. The apparatus served as an alter for Evangelist’s sermons, and featured prominently in his healing rituals. The leader charged up $10 for each “healing,” which earned him quite a large sum of money—and perhaps more than a few enemies.

A purported photo of Evangelist’s religious wax figures (via The Evangelist Murder Archives)

Along with his religious unorthodoxy, Evangelist was also a carpenter. While not as sensational as the cult connections, Evangelist’s day job may provide the best clue as to what happened to his family that dark evening in July. The night before the murders, Evangelist made a call to the watchman of a house that was being torn down. He indicated that he had purchased all salvageable

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It's obvious why Evangelist was a no-show—he and his entire family had been slaughtered. By how did the crew know not to arrive? Evangelist planned to have the sum of cash on hand, yet none was found in the house after the murders. Authorities saw money as the prime motive for the murders, and moved in to find the missing crew. Frustratingly, the name of the delivery company was never recorded, and no suspects could be added to the list.

The Evangelist family (via The Chiseler)

Over the years, multiple theories have surfaced that attempt to explain the Benny Evangelist murder mystery. Some believe an angry client of Evangelist's, milked of his money by the healer's rituals, carried out the killings. Others suspect a disgruntled cult member did the deed, or members of a rival

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Despite the speculation, the case remains unsolved. After nearly ninety years, no one knows who entered the Evangelist home in 1929, making the multiple murders one of the oldest and most brutal cold cases in Detroit history.

[via The Chiseler; The Evangelist Murder Archives; Cold Cases Hard Copy]

Photos (in order): Cold Cases Hard Copy; The Evangelist Murder Archives; The Chiseler

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